DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 442 CS 502 071

AUTHOR Beebe, Steven A.
TITLE Orientation As a Determinant of Group Consensus and Satisfaction.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 19p.; Study prepared at University of Miami

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Convergent Thinking; *Group Discussion; *Group Dynamics; Interaction Process Analysis; Intercommunication; Interpersonal Competence; Interpersonal Relationship; *Orientation; *Problem Solving; *Self Reward; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Consensus; *Orientation Behavior

ABSTRACT

This investigation assessed the importance of orientation behavior on group consensus and the individual satisfaction of participants. Students in four sections of an introductory speech course rated each classmate on a seven-point scale according to orientation behavior as manifested in the ability to resolve conflict, reinforce agreement, encourage participation, and make helpful suggestions. Groups were formed on the basis of the students' ratings. After a problem-solving session, participants were asked to evaluate the following: satisfaction with personal involvement in solving the problem, satisfaction with group participation, and willingness to engage in another problem-solving session with the same group. Results suggest that subjects in those groups with members rated high in orientation behavior were more satisfied with the discussion than were subjects in those groups with members rated low in orientation behavior. Orientation behavior did not seem to affect consensus as measured by the Perceived Consensus Test. (HAI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED154442

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ORIENTATION AS A DETERMINANT OF GROUP CONSENSUS AND SATISFACTION

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Steven A. Beebe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Steven A. Beebe

Communication scholars have long affirmed the importance of consensus and satisfaction as results of group problem-solving. Authors of introductory discussion texts have consistently pointed to the value of these variables in group deliverations.[1] In his discussion of priorities for future research, Gouran[2] lists both satisfaction and consensus as communication outcomes worthy of continued investigation. Studies have been designed to determine antecedent and consequent conditions related to both consensus and satisfaction.[3] But as emphasized in several critiques of small group research,[4] we know little about the type of interaction that determines these group outcomes. This paper reports the results of a study designed to investigate the importance of orientation as an interactive determiner of both group consensus and member satisfaction.

Orientation behavior involves one's ability to resolve conflict, reinforce agreement, encourage participation, and make helpful suggestions. Several researchers

CS502071

have recently been interested in studying orientation behavior as a facilitator of such variables as consensus, quality of decision, and leadership emergence.[5] The most concerted research efforts have been directed toward documenting orientation as a determinant of consensus. Gouran[6] searched among eight variables for those that most distinguished verbal statements of consensus groups from non-consensus groups. After having raters identify the types of verbal statements generated from consensus and non-consensus groups, Gouran found that orientation was more related to consensus than were the other seven variables under investigation.

Knutson[7] carried Gouran's findings one step further. He manipulated orientation behavior by using trained confederates to give either "high orienting" or "low orienting" statements. Results from Knutson's study suggest that groups in the high orientation treatment came closer to agreement than did groups in either the low or no orientation condition.

Considering Knutson's suggestions for further research, Kline[8] designed a study to test the relationship between orientation behavior and consensus without the use of confederates. He supported the research of both Gouran and Knutson by concluding that "orientation is positively related to group consensus."[9]

To further validate orientation behavior as a determinant of group consensus, Fischbach[10] designed a study using a

question of fact. Again using confederates to manipulate orientation, Fischbach found that greater consensus was acheived in the high orientation condition, as measured by the Perceived Consensus Test.

The Gouran, Knutson, Kline, and Fischbach studies thus suggest that highly oriented groups will achieve more agreement or consensus than will groups of low orientation. The present study will seek to lend further support to this hypothesis. It will attempt to document the relationship between orientation and consensus without the use of confederates and utilizing a question of fact for discussion.

Orientation may be more than a determinant of group consensus alone; it may also facilitate member satisfaction. There appear to be no published investigations, however, that specifically consider orientation as a determinant of satisfaction. Theory and research that have considered antecedent and consequent causes of satisfaction suggest that group members who hold positions of high power and centrality will generally be more satisfied with their efforts than members who hold positions of low power and centrality.[11] A few sociometric studies suggest that interaction with persons of one's choice will result in more increased satisfaction than will interaction with persons one has not chosen.[12] There is some ambiguity, however, concerning the

relationship between consensus and satisfaction. Guetzkow and Gyr report only a .46 correlation between the two constructs.[13] Gouran states that groups who reached some decision on their discussion question reported greater satisfaction than did non-decision groups.[14] However, he did not find a similar relationship when he replicated the study. Confusion continues as to how these two important communication constructs are related. Perhaps it is the atmosphere generated by a highly oriented group that affects both consensus and the satisfaction perceived by the group members. In summarizing research dealing with group satisfaction, Guetzkow and Collins report that "most satisfaction stems from the interpersonal rewards directly provided by interaction among participants."[15]

If it is true that satisfaction is facilitated by interpersonal rewards, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a group composed of members high in orientation will foster increased member satisfaction. An individual who has high orientation characteristics is one who tries to resolve conflict, make helpful suggestions, reinforce agreement, and encourage participation. It can be argued that all of these behaviors would tend to maximize the reward of the group for each of its members. Research is needed to explicate the type of interaction that stimulates a member's satisfaction with his group. Gouran speculates

that knowledge of what maximizes satisfaction could be very valuable in establishing a desirable group climate, or at least in avoiding an unhealthy one.[16]

This study sought to replicate findings which have suggested that orientation creates more agreement among members than does lack of orientation. But perhaps more importantly, this investigation examined orientation behavior as an interactive determinant of member satisfaction. The following hypotheses, based upon previous theory and research, were tested:

H1 — Groups whose members are rated high in orientation behavior will come closer to reaching consensus than will groups whose members are rated low in orientation.

H2 — Groups whose members are rated high in orientation behavior will achieve greater satisfaction than will groups whose members are rated low in orientation.

Method

Three days before conducting the experiment, the investigator gave a ten-minute lecture to four sections of the introductory speech course at a mid-western university on the difference between high orientation and low orientation behavior. The students were then told to rate each classmate on a seven-point scale, according to his orientation behavior. Students were instructed to give a classmate a

high orientation rating if, on the basis of previous discussions and group exercises, they felt that classmate to be a person who: (1) resolved conflict, (2) made helpful suggestions, (3) reinforced agreement, and (4) encouraged participation. Students were told to give a classmate a low orientation rating if he was a person who tried to: (1) intensify conflict, (2) withhold information, (3) insist no agreement could be reached, and (4) discourage participation. Prior to evaluating their classmates, each student had participated in a variety of small group class activities.

An average orientation rating was obtained for each study. Groups were formed on the basis of students' ratings. In each of the four sections, the five students who rated highest on "orientation behavior" were placed in the high orientation treatment. Similarly, the five students who were ranked lowest in orientation were placed in the low orientation treatment group. Thus, twenty subjects participated in each condition. However, because of outside interruptions during the discussion, results from one section were discounted in the analysis, leaving a total N of thirty subjects, fifteen in each condition.

Students in the high orientation conditions had a mean rating of 5.75, as compared with students in the low orientation conditions, who had an arverage rating of 4.00. A t test was run comparing the average orientation ratings between the two treatment groups. Results indicate the two groups were rated significantly different ($t = 16.05$, $p = .01$, $df = 28$).

On the day of the experiment subjects were told that they were going to participate in a problem-solving discussion. Groups were announced and were allowed thirty minutes to complete the problem, which was the NASA case study. Students who were neither among the five highest nor five lowest in orientation behavior were assigned randomly to groups. Results from these groups were not included in the experiment. At the conclusion of the exercise, each subject completed the Perceived Consensus Test[17] to measure group agreement (see Table 1). Participant satisfaction was measured by asking subjects the following questions: (1) How satisfied are you with your own participation in solving the problem? (2) How satisfied are you that all group members participated? (3) How satisfied would you be to engage in another problem-solving task with the same group?[18] Subjects responded to these questions on a five-point scale. In addition, subjects were asked to respond to the open-ended question, "How did you feel about participating in this group discussion?" This question was designed to be a validity and reliability check of the dependent variables. After all subjects were finished with the questions, the investigator collected the materials and analyzed the data. Subjects were then debriefed as to the purpose of the experiment.

Results

Hypothesis One

The first research hypothesis predicted that high orientation groups will come significantly closer to reaching consensus than will low orientation groups. A t test for unrelated measures was computed for each of the six items on the Perceived Consensus Test. As shown in Table 1, contrary to prediction, there was no significant difference between high orientation groups and low orientation groups for items 1, 3, and 5. As predicted, however, significant t scores were obtained for items 2, 4, and 6. Thus, while lending some support, the results do not decisively confirm the hypothesis that high orientation groups will come significantly closer to reaching consensus than low orientation groups.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis predicted that high orientation groups will be more satisfied than will low orientation groups. Separate t tests were computed for each of the questions regarding satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, significant t scores were obtained for each question assessing member satisfaction. The results confirmed the prediction that high orientation groups will be more satisfied than will low orientation groups.

Discussion

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis was not clearly supported. While three of the six scales were rated significantly different between the high orientation and low orientation groups, the three scales that failed to attain significance were those primarily concerned with total group agreement. The three scales that did reach significance largely served to validate the independent variable. Compared to the low orientation groups, members of the high orientation groups felt a more warm, easy-going atmosphere, thought the topic was discussed in a more orderly manner, and concluded that their discussion was more open-minded and non-opinionated. These characteristics would be expected from a group whose members are perceived by others as being those who would resolve conflict, make helpful suggestions, reinforce agreement, and encourage participation. While items 1, 3, and 5 were not significant, they were directional as predicted.

Lack of complete support for the first hypothesis may stem from several factors. As indicated in Table 1, mean ratings for the first item concerning agreement were high for both groups. Both treatment groups felt they reached a modicom of agreement. The Perceived Consensus Test does not differentiate between majority agreement reached by a vote

and complete consensus. Agreement was not qualified. Future studies could measure consensus as did Kline,[19] who obtained pre- and posttest measures of agreement. The investigator may then discern whether majority agreement or complete consensus was reached.

Another reason for both groups' reporting that they reached agreement could be attributed to the topic of discussion. Fischbach, who also used the NASA case study as a problem for discussion, wisely noted, "Students have seldom pondered the intricacies of space travel and the implements required for a successful journey."[20] The salience of the topic may affect the agreement reached by the group. If subjects feel low ego-involvement in the task, they could easily be persuaded to agree on any solution; their prime objective is just to complete the task. Subjects in the present study were instructed to write a statement concerning their feelings about participating in their group. Thirty percent of the subjects in the low orinetation groups reported some degree of apathy in discussing the problem. Exemplary is the comment by one study who wrote, "I was apathetic about the whole thing. The problem didn't seem to be relevant." Thus, the low orientation group may have reached moderate agreement on the topic simply because several members perceived the task as unimportant. Future researchers examining consensus as a dependent variable should pretest several topics, as did Gouran and Knutson, to provide for control of topic salience.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis was supported. Subjects in the high orientation group felt more satisfied with their participation in solving the problem than did subjects in low orientation groups. High orientation group members were also more satisfied that all group members participated. Furthermore, they reported that they would be more willing to engage in another problem-solving task with the same group significantly more often than did the low orientation group members. To validate the three questions assessing member satisfaction, subjects were instructed to write a few sentences explaining how they felt about participating in their group. Ninety-four percent of the subjects in the high orientation group responded that they enjoyed working with their group. Only forty-seven percent of the subjects in the low orintation groups expressed some degree of enjoyment with the task. These results lend support to the theory that interpersonal rewards generated by persons who try to resolve conflict, reinforce agreement, encourage participation, and make helpful suggestions result in increased member satisfaction.

Caution must be exerted, however, in over-generalizing from the results of the present study. Because of the restricted population sampled, the external validity of the results is limited. Additional research using a larger sample and a less restricted population will be needed to lend

credence to the conclusions of this report. In addition, discussion questions other than questions of fact could be employed to test the relationship between orientation and satisfaction. Policy questions pretested to control for salience of the topic would result in more generalizable results. As Lorge, et al. have judiciously observed, policy problems are probably more representative of the problems faced by groups in actual problem-solving discussions.[21]

In conclusion, scholars have documented the significance of both consensus and satisfaction as imporant communication variables. If interactive determinants of these two construts are discovered, the results should have important practical and pedagogical significance. Discussants could be encouraged to exhibit high orientation characteristics to foster agreement and increased satisfaction. More studies examining orientation behavior as an interactive determinant of improved communication outcomes may provide fruitful conclusions applicable to improved group communication.

NOTES

[1] For example see: E. G. Bormann, Discussion and Group Methods (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); H. E. Gulley, Discussion, Conference and Group Process (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960); J. H. McBurney and K. G. Hance, Discussions in Human Affairs (New York: Harper Bros., 1950); Dennis S. Gouran, Discussion: The Process of Group Decision-Making (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[2] Dennis S. Gouran, "Group Communication: Perspectives and Priorities for Future Research," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 57 (1973), 22-29.

[3] Representative studies include: A. P. Hare, "A Study of Interaction and Consensus in Different Sized Groups," American Sociological Review, 17 (1952), 261-267; Henry W. Riecken, "The Effect of Talkativeness on Ability to Influence Group Solutions of Provlems," Sociometry, 21 (1958), 309-321; Marvin E. Shaw, "Some Effects of Individually Prominent Behavior upon Group Effectiveness and Member Satisfaction," Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, 59 (1959), 382-386.

[4] Ernest G. Bormann, "The Paradox and Promise of Small Group Research," Speech Monographs, 37 (August, 1970), 211-217; Carl E. Larson, "Speech Communication Research on Small Groups," Speech Teacher, 20 (March, 1971), 89-107; C. David Mortensen, "The Status of Small Group Research," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (October, 1970), 304-309; Gouran (1973).

[5] See for example: R. M. Fischbach, "An Experimental Investigation of the Effects of Orientation on Consensus and Quality of Group Solutions," Paper presnted at Speech Communication Association Convention (November, 1973); T. J. Knutson and W. E. Holdridge, "Small Group Consensus: Orientation Behavior and Leadership, A Reconceptualization," Paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, (November, 1973).

[6] Dennis S. Gouran, "Variables Related to Consensus in Group Discussions of Questions of Policy," Speech Monographs, 36 (1969), 387-391.

[7] Thomas J. Knutson, "An Experimental Study of the Effects of Orientation Behavior on the Probability of Reaching Consensus in Group Discussions of Questions of Policy" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1970).

[8] John A. Kline, "Orientation and Group Consensus," Central States Speech Journal, 23 (1972), 44-47.

[9] Kline, (1972), p. 47.

[10] Fischbach, (1973).

[11] H. B. Gerard, "Some Effects of Status, Role Clarity, and Group Goal Clarity upon the Individual's Relations to Group Process," Journal of Personality, 25 (1957), 475-488; H. J. Leavitt, "Some Effects of Certain Communication Patterns on Group Performance," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 46 (1951), 38-50; W. A. Haythorn, "The Influence of Individual Members on the Characterisitcs of Small Groups," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 48 (1953), 276-284.

[12] R. H. Van Zelst, "Validation of a Sociometric Regrouping Procedure," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 47 (1952), 299-301; Irwin W. Cockriel and John A. Kline, "Sociometric Choice as a Determinant of Satisfaction and Problem Solving Success in Discussion Groups," Paper presented at Central States Speech Association, (April, 1973).

[13] Harold Guetzkow and John Gyr, "An Analysis of Conflict in Decision-Making Groups," Human Relations, 7 (1954), p. 371.

[14] Dennis S. Gouran, "Correlates of Member Satisfaction in Group Decision-Making Discussions," Central States Speech Journal, 24 (Summer, 1973), 91-96.

[15] Barry E. Collins and Harold Guetzkow, A Social Psychology of Group Processes of Decision-Making (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964), p. 209.

[16] Gouran, (1973), p. 25.

[17] For information on the construction and validation of the Perceived Consensus Test see: Thomas J. Knutson, Jae-Won Lee, and Jeffrey E. Danes, "Construction of a Test to Measure Perceived Consensus in Small Groups," Paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, (November, 1973).

[18] These questions were taken from the Cockriel and Kline study (1973).

[19] Kline, (1972).

[20] Fischbach, (1973), p. 9.

[21] I. Lorge, et al., "Survey of Studies Contrasting the Quality of Group Performance and Individual Performance, 1920-1957," Psychological Bulletin, 55 (1958), 337-372.

Table 1

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR PERCEIVED CONSENSUS TEST

Item	High O. $\bar{X}$	Low O. $\bar{X}$	Dif.	t-score
1. Your group reached moderate agreement on the topic you were discussing	6.46	5.93	.53	1.274
2. There was a relatively warm, easy-going atmosphere during your discussion	6.60	5.60	1.00	2.392*
3. Even if you had continued, your group probably would not have reached agreement on the topic you were discussing	6.0	6.47	.47	.783
4. In general, the members in your group discussed the topic in an understandable and orderly manner	6.26	5.26	1.00	2.525*
5. Most of the members in your group did not make helpful suggestions on the topic you were discussing	5.93	6.8	.87	1.650
6. Some of the participants in your group discussion were more close-minded and opinionated than open-minded and non-opinionated	4.40	5.80	1.40	2.834*

*Significant at the .05 level (2.048 required for significance) df=28

Table 2

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR SATISFACTION

Item	High O. $\bar{X}$	Low O. $\bar{X}$	Dif.	t score
1. How satisfied are you with your own participation in solving the problem	4.33	3.80	.53	2.112*
2. How satisfied are you that all group members participated?	4.67	3.73	.94	3.601*
3. How satisfied would you be to engage in another problem-solving task with the same group?	4.53	3.37	.80	2.484*

*Significant at the .05 level (2.048 required for significance) df=28